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SUBJECT: TURKISH STRAITS AT CAPACITY

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¶1. Summary: On February 11, Capt. Salih Orakci, General Director of the Coastal Safety and Salvage Administration briefed A/S Sullivan and members of the EPC delegation on the hazards of navigating the Turkish Straits and the operation of the Vessel Traffic System (VTS) in the Bosphorous Straits.

Capt. Tuncay Cehreli, Manager of the Istanbul VTS Center, and Dr. Nilufer Oral, maritime law expert at Istanbul Bilgi University, also assisted with the briefing. Orakci told Sullivan that the Straits were currently at capacity. Poor quality crew aboard a large proportion of ships combined with the inability to mandate pilots and/or tug boats for transiting ships meant that a catastrophic accident could occur "at any time." End Summary.

¶2. EEB A/S Dan Sullivan and members of the U.S. delegation to the third U.S. - Turkey Economic Partnership Commission delegation requested a briefing on the environmental and safety challenges facing the Government of Turkey as it copes with a large volume of oil tanker and other hazardous cargo traffic through the Turkish Straits. On February 11, Capt. Salih Orakci, General Director of the Coastal Safety and Salvage Administration, and Capt. Tuncay Cehreli, Manager of the Istanbul VTS Center, briefed the group on their agency's efforts to administer safe passage of the straits.

¶3. The Turkish Straits are 164 nautical miles (NM) in length, stretching from the Black Sea to the Aegean. The Bosphorous (Istanbul Strait) comprises 17 NM and the Canakkale Strait 37 NM. The remaining 110 NM span the distance between the two major straits in the Sea of Marmara. The Vessel Traffic System (VTS) system, purchased from Lockheed Martin, has been fully operational since December 2003. The VTS system has assisted in gathering information about ships that transit the Straits as well as in improving the safety of navigation and protecting the marine environment by reducing the frequency and seriousness of maritime accidents, according to Cehreli.

¶4. From 2003 to 2006 the annual number of ships transiting the straits has hovered just under 55,000 with approximately 10,000 of those carrying hazardous cargo, a level that both Orakci and Cehreli argue represents the full capacity of the Straits. In 2006 10,153 vessels carrying 143,452,401 MT of hazardous cargo transited the Bosphorous. This included over 95 million MT of crude oil, almost 40 million MT of refined petroleum product, 4.5 million MT of LPG and 3.5 million MT of chemicals. Over 98% of vessels carrying hazardous cargo through the straits are southbound from Black Sea ports and over half of these are loaded at Novorossiysk, a port which accounted for 903 tankers carrying 75 million metric tons of hazardous cargo in 2006. By contrast, Cehreli noted that in 2006 the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline carried 8.9 million MT of crude oil or approximately 80 tanker loads. He acknowledged that BTC began operation partway through the

year and was not yet operating at full capacity but argued that even at capacity BTC would have no real effect on straits traffic, which has a capacity of 100 million MT of crude oil annually. Noting that from a technical perspective pipelines are safer than maritime transport, Orakci stressed the need for additional alternate routes to take the pressure off the Turkish Straits.

15. The Bosphorous is one of the most crowded, difficult and potentially dangerous waterways in the world. Strong currents and counter currents, sharp turns and the need to course correct twelve times during the transit make passage hazardous even in good weather conditions. However, although the International Maritime Organization strongly recommends the use of a pilot in the Turkish Straits, under the provisions of the 1936 Montreaux Convention and the 1982 Law of the Sea Agreement pilotage is voluntary, Cehreli explained. As a result only 36% of transit vessels take a pilot in the Bosphorous and less than 2% use an escort tug. According to Prof. Nilufer Oral of Bilgi University, even though the Turkish Straits are an international waterway, the current maritime law regime permits the Turkish Government to enforce certain measures to maintain safety. These measures include provisions requiring vessels to utilize adequate radio and navigational aids, separation and overtaking requirements designed to avoid collisions and other precautionary measures such as daylight only transits for vessels carrying hazardous cargo.

16. Despite these precautions failures are a frequent event in the Bosphorous. On average a vessel suffers a mechanical or navigational failure every 2.5 days. More alarmingly, at least one vessel greater than 200M in length fails every year in the Bosphorous. In 1998 the Romanian tanker Independanta collided with a general cargo vessel at the lower end of the Bosphorous causing a massive explosion that killed 43 people as well as a major oil spill. In February 2006, the Liberian flagged Genmar Star carrying 86,000 MT of kerosene lost its

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rudder and came within 60 meters of running ashore at the historic Dolmabahce Palace. Genmar Star was carrying a pilot who helped anchor the ship while VTS Center staff dispatched tugboats to arrest the vessel's drift toward shore, thus averting a major accident. Orakci told Sullivan that the next major accident in the straits is more a question of if than when, and that he worries every time his telephone rings in the early morning (when the majority of hazardous cargo transits occur.) Orakci argued that poorly trained personnel were at least as much of a threat as aged vessels or poor equipment. Cehreli noted that a collision involving two small general cargo vessels could cause a major accident if it occurs just in front of a fully loaded oil tanker.

17. A/S Sullivan did not clear this message before departing.
JONES